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The Watch (2012 film)

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The Watch (previously known as ***Neighborhood Watch***)[3] is a 2012 science fiction comedy film directed by Akiva Schaffer and written by Jared Stern, Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg. It stars Ben Stiller, Vince Vaughn, Jonah Hill and Richard Ayoade. The film follows Evan (Stiller), Bob (Vaughn), Franklin (Hill), and Jamarcus (Ayoade), a group of neighbors who form a suburban neighborhood-watch group. When they uncover an alien plot threatening the world, they are forced into action.

The film began its development in 2008 under producer Shawn Levy as a teen-targeted project written by Jared Stern. Between 2009 and late 2010 it saw different directors and stars join the project until November 2010, when it moved in a new direction under Rogen and Goldberg (who rewrote the script for an adult audience). Filming began in October 2011 in the state of Georgia, concluding in January 2012.

The film's marketing campaign was affected by the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin by a neighborhood-watch member. As a result, the campaign was refocused on the alien premise instead of the film leads and the film's name was changed from *Neighborhood Watch* to *The Watch*. It was released on July 27, 2012 in North America. It received generally negative reviews; most of the criticism focused on the plot, frequent "vulgar and offensive" jokes and numerous product placements. The lead cast was more positively received.

The Watch

Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Akiva Schaffer
Produced by	Shawn Levy
Written by	Jared Stern Seth Rogen Evan Goldberg
Starring	Ben Stiller Vince Vaughn Jonah Hill Richard Ayoade Rosemarie DeWitt
Music by	Christophe Beck
Cinematography	Barry Peterson
Edited by	Dean Zimmerman
Production company	21 Laps Productions
Distributed by	20th Century Fox
Release date(s)	July 27, 2012
Running time	102 minutes[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	$68 million[2]
Box office	$68.3 million[1]

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Plot [edit]

In the town of Glenview, Ohio, Evan Trautwig (Ben Stiller) is an active participant in the community and senior manager of the local Costco store. His life is disrupted when the store's night security guard is murdered. The local police have no leads, and show no interest in investigating further. Determined to find the killer and bring him to justice, Evan decides to form a neighborhood watch. However, he only manages to recruit Bob (Vince Vaughn), a construction worker and loving father; Franklin (Jonah Hill), a high school dropout who dreams of being a police officer but failed the written, physical, and mental-health tests; and Jamarcus (Richard Ayoade), a recent divorcé.

The watch members use the group as an excuse to drink and have fun (much to Evan's annoyance). While driving on patrol, they accidentally hit something. They discover a strange metallic orb that acts as a highly-destructive weapon, and deduce that it is of alien origin. Meanwhile, several more townspeople are mysteriously killed. The watch responds to the murders and encounters an alien, which attacks them. Evan (apparently) kills it with a lawn gnome before the group returns with the creature to Bob's house. The creature regains consciousness and escapes, stealing the metallic orb and warning them that the aliens have already infiltrated the town. The watch theorizes that the aliens are stealing their victims' skin and disguising themselves as humans, so anyone in Glenview could be an alien. Bob confides to Evan that he is worried about his daughter Chelsea (Erin Moriarty), and does not trust her

boyfriend Jason (Nicholas Braun). Evan admits that he has been avoiding his wife Abby (Rosemarie DeWitt) because he is infertile, and revealing that to her may cause her to leave.

Evan suspects that one of his neighbors is an alien (due to his strange, stiff way of speaking and because he always seems to be watching him). As the watch scouts the neighbor's house, Bob learns that Chelsea is at an unsupervised party with Jason. Bob disobeys Evan's orders, and rushes to the party with Franklin. Bob prevents Jason from raping Chelsea, but Jason beats him until Franklin intervenes. Evan and Jamarcus investigate the odd neighbor alone, discovering that he (only) hosts orgies in his basement. When Bob returns, he and Evan argue over his putting his daughter above the watch. Bob is fired from the watch after saying Evan has no friends because he tries to control everything. Evan goes home and admits his infertility to Abby, who accepts the news and tells him they will work things out.

Evan then receives an urgent call from Jamarcus, who confesses that he is one of the aliens but has decided to side with humanity after experiencing human culture (and oral sex). He warns the group that the aliens are building a transmitter (beneath the Costco store) which will summon their armada to destroy the earth, and is expelled from the watch for his deception. Bob, Franklin, Evan and Abby arm themselves and infiltrate the Costco to destroy the transmitter. Bob encounters Jason who reveals that he is also an alien, and they fight. Evan and Franklin attempt to disable the transmitter, but are surrounded by aliens. Jamarcus arrives and saves the pair, revealing that the aliens' brains are located in their crotch; Bob kills Jason by ripping off his penis. Evan discovers that the transmitter is powered by the metallic orb and removes it, disabling the machine. More aliens arrive, forcing the group to flee. The watch uses the metallic orb to destroy the Costco building, killing all of the aliens inside.

In the epilogue, Evan and Abby rekindle their passion and adopt a daughter. Bob is closer to Chelsea and accepts her new boyfriend (who is intimidated by stories of how Bob killed Jason by "ripping his dick off"). Franklin is finally accepted by the Glenview Police Department, and Jamarcus continues participating in the secret neighborhood orgies. The group maintains the watch, continuing to protect Glenview from criminals (and aliens).

Cast [edit]

- Ben Stiller as Evan Trautwig, a Costco manager and suburban resident who forms a neighborhood watch after his friend is murdered; he keeps forming new groups because he has no friends.[4][5]
- Vince Vaughn as Bob McAllister, a resident who uses the watch to spy on his teenage daughter; Vaughn began negotiations to star in June 2011.[4][6] The character's relationship with his daughter is what convinced Vaughn to take the role.[7]
- Jonah Hill as Franklin, a resident with emotional problems who joins the watch after being rejected by the local police force;[8][9] Hill's involvement was confirmed in August 2011.[10] His prior commitment to *The Watch* forced him to decline a role in Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*, which he had considered "the perfect next step" following his 2011 Academy Award nomination.[11] However, he later secured a role in the film.[12] Hill spent two weeks learning to use a balisong knife for his character.[13]
- Richard Ayoade as Jamarcus, a recently divorced resident; Chris Tucker was considered for the role before Ayoade was signed.[14]
- Rosemarie DeWitt as Abby Trautwig (Evan's wife)[15]

The cast also includes Erin Moriarty (as Chelsea McAllister, Bob's daughter),[16] Nicholas Braun (as Jason, Chelsea's boyfriend),[17] Will Forte (as Sergeant Bressman), Mel Rodriguez (as his partner Chucho), Doug Jones (as the chief alien villain),[18][19] R. Lee Ermey as Manfred Salisbury (a local resident) and Joseph A. Nunez as Antonio Guzman (Evan's colleague, whose murder inspires him to start the neighborhood watch). Billy Crudup appears (uncredited) as Evan's "creepy neighbor", Paul.[20] Director Akiva Schaffer and his collaborators in the comedy troupe The Lonely Island, Andy Samberg and Jorma Taccone, make cameo appearances in the film as masturbating participants in Paul's orgy.[21]

Production [edit]

Development [edit]

The film began its development as *Neighborhood Watch* in early 2008, with Levy developing the project over three years (based on an idea by 20th Century Fox executive John Fox). Levy described his original vision as a "PG-13 kind of Ghostbusters-y thing."[22][23] The original screenplay was written by Jared Stern.[23] In May 2009, David Dobkin and Will Ferrell were negotiating to direct and star, respectively[24][25] (with Dobkin's involvement progressing to revising Stern's script). However, by August Dobkin and Ferrell had left the project.[26]

In December 2009 Peter Segal was in negotiations to direct the film,[27] but by November 2010 the project had not named a director.[23] Also in November, Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg were brought onto the project to rewrite the script as an adult-oriented, R-rated film.[23][28] By June 2011, *Saturday Night Live* alumnus Akiva Schaffer was given the option to direct[29] his second feature film (following the 2007 comedy *Hot Rod*).[30] On May 4, 2012 (two months before the film's release), it was renamed *The Watch*.[3][31]

Filming [edit]

Principal photography began in October 2011 in Georgia, with filming occurring in Atlanta[22][32] (including Inman Park[33]) and several areas in Cobb County (including the Oakleigh,[34] Echo Mill, and Amberton subdivisions in the city of Powder Springs).[33] Filming also took place at Marietta Square in the city of Marietta, where businesses were renamed and an alley behind Hemingway's Bar & Grill was treated to artificially age the buildings.[35][36] One of the Marietta scenes filmed involved a young boy on a skateboard being abducted by aliens.[37] Scenes were also filmed in the Brookhaven community.[4] On October 25, 2011, a casting call was made for extras to fill the football stadium during two nights of filming on November 2–3 at Campbell High School in Smyrna, Georgia.[38] On November 23, 2011 a minor, walk-on role in the film was auctioned to benefit the Stiller Foundation; the role was sold for $23,000 to an undisclosed bidder.[39][40]

Original alien-themed, bullet-ridden poster with modified neighborhood watch sign, replaced when Fox sought to distance the premise from the Trayvon Martin case

In late November 2011, the site of a former BJ's Wholesale Club in Norcross, Georgia was converted in appearance to a Costco for shooting.[41][42] On January 23, 2012, Hill announced that filming had concluded.[30] Multiple scene takes were made, allowing the cast to follow the script as written and inject their own improvisations.[13] Special effects company Legacy Effects provided creature designs and effects for the aliens.[22][43] The alien costume featured an animatronic head, remotely controlled by three people. The suit was hot even in cold areas, and had to be unzipped to let Doug Jones cool off between takes. The costume was enhanced with CGI in a number of ways, including replacing arms and dilating pupils (which Schaffer thought made the creature seem more alive).[44]

Marketing [edit]

The *Neighborhood Watch* marketing campaign began on February 29, 2012 with the release of a teaser poster, trailer and the unveiling of the film's website, jointhewatch.com.[45] The film's trailer was nominated for a Golden Trailer award, recognizing achievements in marketing.[46] On March 27, 2012, it was reported that 20th Century Fox had the poster and trailer removed from Florida theaters in response to increasing controversy surrounding the February shooting death of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida by neighborhood-watch captain George Zimmerman. The trailer featured Hill imitating a gun with his hand pretending to shoot at teenagers, while the poster featured a bullet-ridden, alien-themed neighborhood-watch sign. According to insiders Fox intended to move into the next phase of the marketing campaign as soon as possible (focusing on the film's science-fiction aspects), while replacing previous posters with images of the cast.[47][48] Fox maintained that the July 27, 2012, release date would remain unchanged by the Martin case or the marketing changes.[49]

In a statement about the changes Fox said, "We are very sensitive to the Trayvon Martin case, but our film is a broad alien-invasion comedy and bears absolutely no relation to the tragic events in Florida...these initial marketing materials were released before this incident ever came to light. The teaser materials were part of an early phase of our marketing and were never planned for long-term use."[47] The alien-focused campaign began on May 4, 2012 with the release of a new trailer, coinciding with Fox's changing the film's title to *The Watch* to further distance the film from the Martin case.[3][31]

Release [edit]

The premiere of *The Watch* took place on July 23, 2012 at Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood.[21][50] It was released in North America on July 27, 2012. On July 25, Harkins Theatres (the sixth-largest North American cinema chain) announced it would not be showing the film after failing to reach a financial agreement with Fox.[51]

Box office [edit]

The film earned $35,353,000 in North America and $32,914,862 from markets elsewhere for a worldwide total of $68,267,862.[1] In the week before release, pre-release tracking showed that up to 25 percent of North American audiences were reluctant to visit cinemas following the mass murder in a Colorado cinema the previous week. This, plus competition from the simultaneous launch of the 2012 Summer Olympics, would negatively impact ticket sales for *The Watch*. Tracking showed that the film could earn $13–15 million during its opening weekend.[52][53][54]

The film earned an estimated $4.5 million on its opening day. During its opening weekend it earned $12.7 million from 3,168 theaters – an average of $4,025 per theater – ranking third behind *Ice Age: Continental Drift* ($13.3 million) and *The Dark Knight Rises* ($62.1 million).[1][55] The largest segments of the opening-weekend audience were over age 25 (59%) and male (60%).[55] The film left theaters on October 18, 2012 (after 12 weeks) with a total gross of $35.3 million.[1]

Outside North America, the film had its most successful opening weekends in the United Kingdom ($3.5 million), Australia ($1.8 million) and Russia ($1.3 million).[56] These countries also represented its largest total grosses, with

$6 million from the UK, $5.9 million from Australia and $3.2 million from Russia.[56]

Critical reception [edit]

The Watch received negative reviews from critics. On the review-aggregate website Rotten Tomatoes, it has garnered a 17% approval rating from 154 critics, with an average rating of 4 out of 10. The consensus is that "*The Watch* uneasily mixes sci-fi elements with gross-out gags and strands its talented cast with a script that favors vulgarity over wit at nearly every turn."[57] Metacritic gave it a score of 36 out of 100 from 35 critics, indicating "generally unfavorable" reviews.[58] CinemaScore polls reported that the average grade moviegoers gave the film was a C+ on an A+-to-F scale.[59]

The Hollywood Reporter's Sheri Linden described the film as feeling like "part three of a past-its-prime franchise", criticizing the plot as moving "lazily from setup to punchline to setup, with no particular point and almost no punch".[60] Roger Ebert awarded the film 2 out of 4 stars, stating that the film "has lots of energy but not much inspiration". Ebert commented that the comic timing of the lead actors benefits the dialog, but frequent instances of "crude, vulgar and offensive" comedy became unwelcome and unamusing.[61] *The Rolling Stone*'s Peter Travers awarded the film 1.5 out of 4 stars, stating that it should have been a "*Ghostbusters* lite" and "should be crazy, stupid fun but settles for just stupid." He was also critical of the use of Costco in the plot, which he considered product placement. However, he praised Hill's "scene-stealing" performance.[62]

Entertainment Weekly's Lisa Schwarzbaum commented that the film struggles to find a "coherent" style between the "PG-13 rated aliens" and adult themes and dialogue.[63] *The A.V. Club*'s Keith Phipps also unfavorably compared the film to *Ghostbusters*, stating that it struggles to replicate that film's successful formula but fails to innovate with the story or characters. He also criticized the frequent Costco promotion. Phipps praised Ayoade: "...he lends an unpredictable element to the group dynamic, and to the film. It's the sort of performance that ought to be plucked for use in another, better movie."[64] *Variety*'s Justin Chang complimented the interaction between the four leads, but criticized the film for relegating ethnic characters to murder victims and female characters "to be protected or consoled". He described the film as a "lowbrow, lame-brained mash-up of buddies-on-patrol comedy and sci-fi actioner, held together (barely) by an endless string of penis jokes". However, he praised Ayoade's "mellow, nerdy-funky appeal [that represents] one of the [film's] few novel aspects".[65]

The *Los Angeles Times*' Betsy Sharkey was more positive, stating that "the funniest stuff comes from the kind of situational misfires that can happen when dudes try to do things, like catch aliens, that they are clearly not cut out to do". She considered that Schaffer's previous experience directing short comic videos for *Saturday Night Live* was partially responsible for individual comic moments broken up by transitions where "things tend to fall apart".[66] *Screencrush*'s Matt Singer was positive, calling the film funny and praising the improvisational feel of the scenes and "ingenious" set-pieces, but was critical of the promotion of Costco and Costco products throughout.[67] *Boxoffice*'s James Rocchi offered a positive stance, stating that the "plot moves, the supporting cast is lively and the action stays small-scale and intimate, never overwhelming the laughs"; he felt that the profanity and vulgarity never became "stale". Rocchi, however, commented that the film was forgettable and "disposable".[68]

Home media [edit]

The Watch was released on DVD, Blu-ray disc and digital download on November 13, 2012. The DVD version contains deleted scenes, a gag reel, the theatrical trailer and feature videos "Alien Invasions & You" and "Casting the Alien". The Blu-ray disc contains the DVD content, a digital copy of the film and two additional features: "Jonah Alternate Takes" and "Watchmakers."[69][70]

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External links [edit]

- Official website
- *The Watch* at AllMovie
- *The Watch* at Box Office Mojo
- *The Watch* at the Internet Movie Database
- *The Watch* at Metacritic
- *The Watch* at Rotten Tomatoes

Categories: 2012 films | English-language films | 2010s comedy films | American comedy science fiction films | Films about suburbia | 20th Century Fox films | Films shot in Georgia (U.S. state) | Films set in Ohio | Films directed by Akiva Schaffer | Film scores by Christophe Beck | 21 Laps Entertainment films

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